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THE HOLY BIBLE

By

HIS HOLINESS MOR IGNATIUS ZAKKA I
IWAS

*Patriarch Of Antioch And All The East.
The Supreme Head Of The Universal Syrian
Orthodox Church.*

Translated

By

V. Rev. Fr. Zeki Zitoun

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Anyone who asks for this volume, to read, collate, or copy from it, and who appropriates it to himself or herself, or cuts anything out of it, should realize that (s)he will have to give answer before God's awesome tribunal as if (s)he had robbed a sanctuary. Let such a person be held anathema and receive no forgiveness until the book is returned. So be it, Amen! And anyone who removes these anathemas, digitally or otherwise, shall himself receive them in double.

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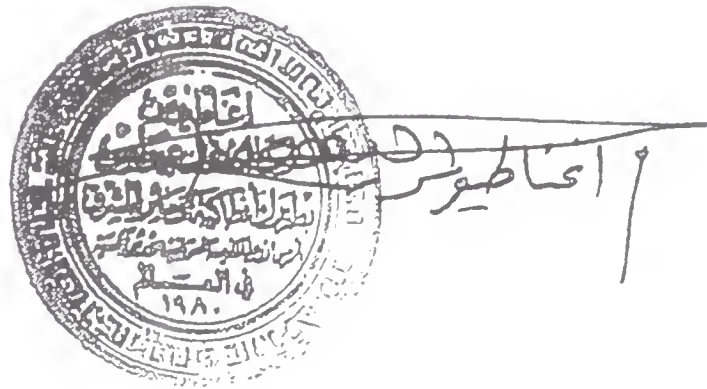
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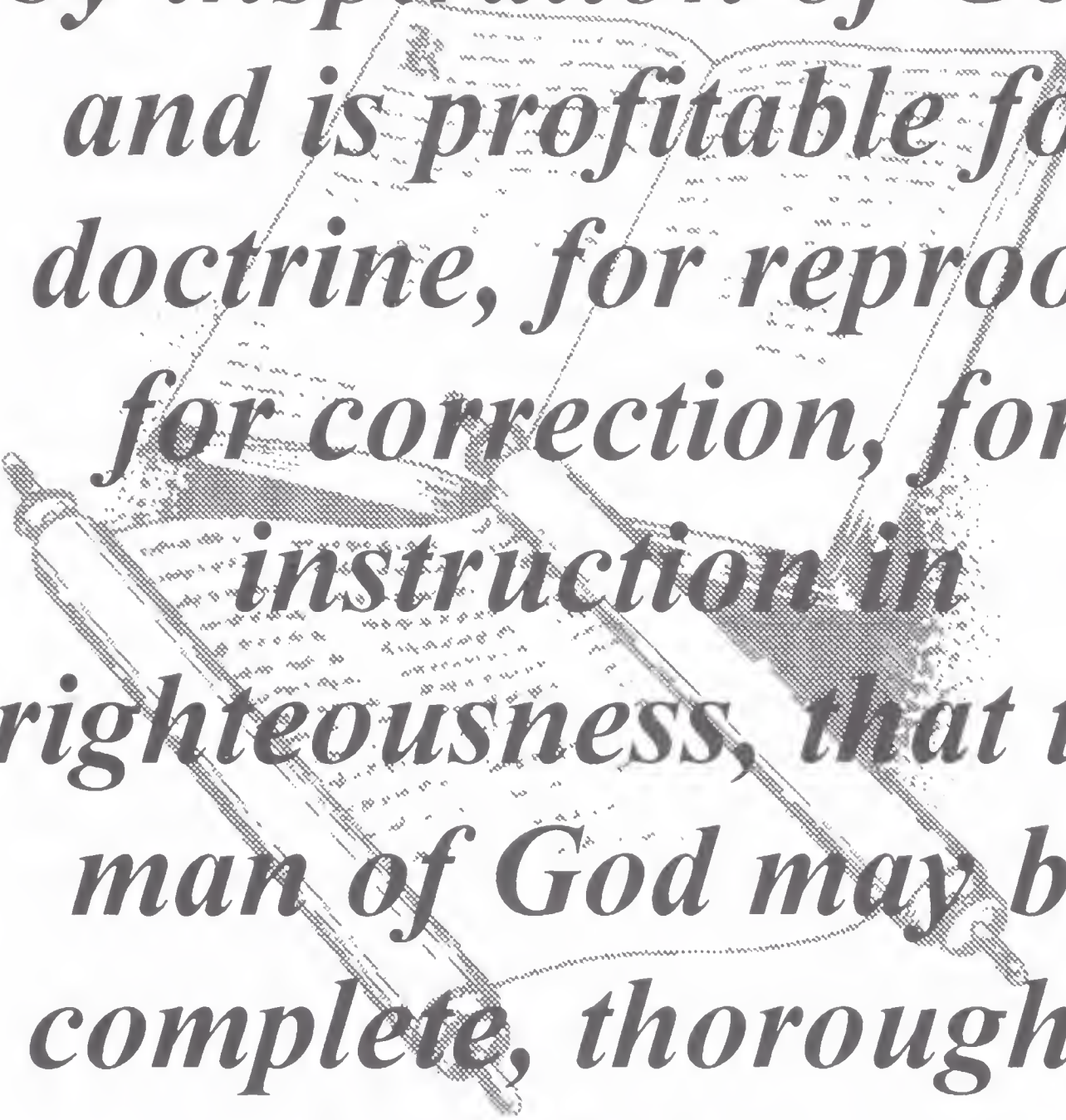


IGNATIUS ZAKKA I IWAS
Patriarch Of Antioch And All The East
Supreme Head Of The Universal Syrian
Orthodox Church

Damascus
26 / 02 / 1998



مبهمه او و من مذب انما الله احد مبهمه
فلمنط والله احد مذب و هم قس اقس هه احد



*“All Scripture is given
by inspiration of God,
and is profitable for
doctrine, for reproof,
for correction, for
instruction in
righteousness, that the
man of God may be
complete, thoroughly
equipped for every
good work.”*

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

THE HOLY BIBLE*

ITS DEFINITION

It is God's Book written by the truthful prophets and holy Apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Saint Paul said: *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*(2 Timothy 3:16-17). Therefore, the Holy Bible is the most valuable treasure that man has received from God, to know the straight way of salvation which leads to the kingdom of God.

ITS SUBJECT

In the Holy Bible, God revealed Himself, His Will and His Laws to men, elucidated the divine truths which surpass the comprehension of the human mind, those which men shall know, confess their truthfulness and believe in them. God showed man the duties and deeds that he shall do to please the Lord and reach perfection. Therefore, the Holy Bible is esteemed as the statute of the faith and deeds in the Christian Church, and the means of salvation in Christ Jesus the Saviour who is the axis of the Book and the centre of the circle in it, around whom the Book revolves from its A to Z, from its Genesis to Revelation.

* As we speak about the Holy Bible, we are pleased to highly praise all the ecumenical organisations and the movements which decided that the year 1982 be the year of the Holy Bible. This is to honour the Living Word of God, endeavour to spread it and to exhort the believers to study it, that they may reap spiritual benefits and to acquire salvation with the holy means of salvation.

In the Old Testament¹ we find God's wisdom in the creation of the universe, and man whom God wanted to be the master of all other creation. We feel the love of God and his mercy towards men, by preparing their salvation and through the revealed truthful prophecies, clear signs as well as innumerable symbols. Also, in the New Testament, we find God appears in the flesh. As Saint Paul the Apostle said: ***“great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16)***. In Him the prophecies were fulfilled as He was accomplishing the act of salvation by the way of the cross. We find Him dead in the flesh, risen from the dead victorious, ascending into heaven, sending the Holy Spirit to guide the disciples to the truth and remind them with His holy word and divine teachings as they spread the word of God in all the world, awaiting His second coming. St. Augustine said: "The Old Testament is manifest in the New and the New is hidden in the Old".

ITS WITHSTANDING

Although, the Holy Bible was written many centuries ago, it is suitable for every century and generation and it is "the Book of all ages", of all nations and people; God's message to all. It is firm and resistant no matter how the conditions change, the generations alter and the ages succeed. In this regard it is said that "The Holy Bible is still keeping its vitality and value and will remain so for ever. Whenever the time turns over, a new page in its history, many biblical facts become evident, its principles become confirmed and its sayings and teachings become firmly rooted". No wonder, the Lord Jesus Christ said: ***“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” (Mat 24:35)***. History also tells us about the attempt of God's enemies to exterminate the Scriptures of the Holy Bible, by destroying all its copies in various ways and

tormenting those who possess them or were entrusted to them. All those enemies perished, but the Holy Bible remained firm and will remain forever. It is the most published book of all time, world wide, and was the first book ever printed when Gutenberg invented printing in the year 1450. Every year around two billion copies are printed in over one thousand two hundred languages and accents. It is read in almost every language of in the world - the word of God acting in men for salvation all over the globe.

ITS ONLY SOURCE

The Holy Bible is composed of (66) books, written by almost (40) people in different times for the duration of more than one thousand five hundred years. The writers did not meet each other for agreement. In addition, the writers were from different environments and various cultures, each one of them was seeking a special goal, and distinguished from the other by his behaviour and temperament. Bearing in mind all those differences, we do not find any contradiction in the teachings of the Holy Bible, but on the contrary, its clear truths consolidating and completing each other. Because its source is one, God the Most High who inspired the prophets and the apostles who wrote it, it emerged as one book in a unique unity literally, dogmatically, spiritually, historically and prophetically. The purpose of the Holy Bible is not to teach science and arts, but every scientific sign in it is a firm truth and does not contradict the firm and truthful scientific theories. Herewith, we do not adopt it as a basis for scientific research, because its aim is merely spiritual. It has been written in an easy style that a juvenile can understand, but also at the same time, it is profound so that the great philosophers are incapable to probe its depth and uncover its secret. This is because it is the Book of God, whose judgements are unattainable.

ITS LAWFULNESS

The law idiomatically is the measure of everything, in Syriac (Qanyo) which is the cane of land-surveying, it was used for measurement with a length of four, six or eight cubits. Also in Syriac (qonoono) which means basis, law and measure. But in Arabic is (al-qanat) which is the straight stick² In the science of the Holy Bible it means the basis and the rules. The lawfulness of the Book, is the acknowledgment of being inspired from God which are the acceptable parts of the Holy Bible.

The early Church studied the lawfulness of the Books of the Holy Bible, and accepted the Books of the Old Testament³ which were among Jews as inspired by God. Saint Peter the Apostle said: *“for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”* (2 Peter 1:21). And Saint Paul the Apostle said: *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.”* (2 Tim 3:16). The New Testament quoted 465 verses from the Old Testament. It is sufficient that the Lord Jesus Christ mentioned twenty people from the personalities of the Old Testament from nineteen books. Also clearly mentioned from the Old Testament many events like, the manna, quails and the serpent of brass etc... We mention some of his many sayings as an example: *“And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them* (the two disciples on the way to Emmaus) *in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”* (Luke 24:27). And when he appeared to his disciples after resurrection in the upper-room *Then He said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me. And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.”* (Luke 24:44-45). By all means,

we have to mention at these points, that the Old Testament comprises 46 Scriptures honoured by the Jews, first, 39 of them were considered lawful, and they hold fast to them at the Babylonian Captivity, because all the sacrifices were stopped, and their worship was confined only to peruse the holy Scriptures. After returning from captivity in the fifth century BC the other seven Scriptures were added to the first 39 Scriptures and were included in the official list in the second century BC. There was disagreement between the Alexandrian Jews and the Palestinian Jews, about the new seven Scriptures (the second canonical). The Alexandrians were recognising the books of Tobit, Judith, The Wisdom, Jesus the Son of Sirach, Baruch and the First and Second Maccabees, but were not accepted by the Palestinian Jews. The Christian Church received the books of the Old Testament from the Jews as we mentioned previously, and with it received the disagreement about some books, which remained raised among the Christians, until the fifth century AD as the Latin Church accepted all the collection of the Alexandrian school, then were accepted by the Greek Church and the other churches.

Concerning the lawfulness of the Scriptures of the New Testament⁴ which we possess today there are 27 books. They were acknowledged by the early Church at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second. It was agreed to accept the books as inspired by God, written by the apostles and disciples those chosen by the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit descended upon them and guided them to use suitable phrases, and safeguarded them from any absurdity or error. They wrote what they had written with clear phrases and confirmed the truth of their words by brilliant miracles and virtuous conduct, by their faith in the truth of what they preached and wrote, not fearing death. The Apostle Paul said: *“As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any*

other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:9). No wonder, their mission has had an impression on the minds and hearts of men who obeyed Christ and believed in His Religion.

ITS LANGUAGES

Most of the books of the Old Testament were written in Hebrew, and since the fifth century BC the Aramaic language replaced the Hebrew in the Jewish daily life. The books of Tobit and Judith were written in Aramaic, likewise some parts of the books of Ezra and Daniel. And the books of the Wisdom and the second Maccabees were written in Greek.

ITS MOST IMPORTANT TRANSLATIONS

The Holy Bible was translated from its original languages to many languages today reaching more than 1200 languages and accents - the most important translations being:

1 THE SEPTUAGINT TRANSLATION: Which was accomplished in Alexandria by the order of the king Ptolemy Philadelphus around 282 BC. Tradition says, that it was completed by 72 translators from among the Jewish scholars. They confined themselves to 72 rooms until they finished their work after 72 days. When the translations were compared, they were found to be as one work by one person. By this, the tradition proved that God the Most High protects his Holy Bible, and that the translation became compatible to the original in a perfect compatibility. The Septuagint translation is of great importance. It was utilised to translate the books of Torah into Latin (Mid 2nd century) and other translations, the Coptic (between 3rd and 5th century AD), and the Armenian (in

5th century), and the Ethiopian (in 4th century) and many others.

2 THE SYRIAC TRANSLATION: Which is known by (Pshitta) the simple. There is no doubt, that most of the chapters of the Book of Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah from the books of the Old Testament, and the Gospel according to Matthew and the Epistle to the Hebrews from the New Testament were written in the Syriac language. At the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century AD., a company of scholars from the converted Jews, translated the Scriptures of the Old Testament from Hebrew to Syriac, most likely, in Edessa. This particular translation was called Sorat Akthob, meaning a copy of the book, which at the eighth century was named by (Pshitta) which means simple, for being abandoned of any eloquence. Also at the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century AD, the Syrians translated the Scriptures of the New Testament from Greek to Syriac, likewise, this translation was known by Pshitta. It included all the books of the New Testament, except the second and third epistles of St. John, the second and the third, the second epistle of Saint Peter, the epistle of Saint Jude and the Revelation of Saint John. The scholars resolved, that this translation was sound and trustworthy without being literal, and still is of great importance. Currently it is considered as one of the most important references in studying the Holy Bible. Its oldest manuscript is preserved in the British museum in London, and it goes back to the fourth century AD. It was counted by some⁵ that there is 55 Syriac manuscripts of the Pshitta translation, written in Strangelo writing, indited in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. They are kept in libraries in the East as well as in the West. Twenty two of these manuscripts are in Latin and only 10 manuscripts in Greek.

There are other translations in Syriac such as the Antiochian, which

is known today by the name Sinaic, for its copy being discovered in the monastery of Mount Sinai in the year 1892. This was indited by the hand-writing of John the Stylite in the monastery of Saint Qanon in Ma'arat Masreen⁶ in either the year 698 AD or 789 AD and was published by Mrs. Louis in the year 1910. Probably Titianus relied on it in gathering the Diatasarun⁷ which is, the mixed Gospel.

The Philoxinian translation, which was completed by the hands of Chorepiscopus Pholiqarbus under the care of Saint Philoxinus bishop of Manbej in the year 505 AD was confined to the translation of the books of the New Testament, and it is supposed that he translated some books of the Old Testament also⁸.

The Herqalite translation, which was translated from Greek by Saint Touma the Herqalite bishop of Manbij in the year (616 AD). And the translation which Saint Paul bishop of Tel-Mouzalt (615-617 +) endeavoured to accomplish from Greek to the Hexapla of Origin which means the sixfold sources and it was called the Septuagint translation, which the Syrian scholars relied on and Bar Hebraeus preferred it in his book (The Store of Secrets) above the Pshitta translation as he declared in his book (The Lights)⁹.

THE ARABIC TRANSLATION

The first Arabic translation of the Holy Gospel in our Syrian History is the translation which was accomplished by the Arab scholars of the Syrian Orthodox Church, descendants of the tribes Tay, Tanookh and Oqayl. That was done by the order of the patriarch John of Sedreh 648+ in response to the wish of Omir son of Saad son of Abee-Waqass the Ansary prince of Al-Jazeera. This translation is now lost¹⁰.

The oldest Arabic translation of the Torah known in the history is from the seventh century AD¹¹ and it was discovered in St. Catherine's monastery at the Peninsula of Sinai in the year (1950). St. John, the bishop of Ashbeela in Spain, translated parts of the Holy Bible into Arabic in the year 750 relying on Heronimous' Latin translation. Also Warqa Son of Nofal translated some parts of the Holy Gospel into Arabic¹².

Many Arabic translations of the books of the Holy Bible were translated from Greek and Syriac. In the 19th century the Scriptures of the Holy Bible were translated from Hebrew and old Greek into Arabic and were printed in Lebanon in the year 1864. Dr. Cornilius Fandick shared in this work by supporting AL-Sheikh Nasif AL-Yazji, teacher Botrus AL-Boustany and Sheikh Yousuf AL-Aseer.

In the year 1876 the Arabic translation, which is known by the Jesuite translation of the books of the Holy Bible together with the second canonical Scriptures, was issued after being translated from Hebrew and Greek.

SOME OTHER TRANSLATIONS

In the year (405) Heronimous completed in Bethlehem his Latin translation known by the Volkatha, which means, the circulated, that is from Hebrew and Greek and it is the authorised translation in the Roman Church.

We must also mention the Armenian translation of the books of the Holy Bible, which was accomplished with the cooperation of the Syrian scholar Daniel and Mesrob the Armenian in the year 404 AD. The Persian translation was completed in the year 1221 by John, son of the priest Yousuf the Syrian Al-Tafleesy. Also Rabban Philipose

the Malabarian translated the Holy Bible from Syriac to Malayalam the language of South India¹³ in the 19th century.

THE DIATESSARON

Around the year 172 AD Tatian the Syrian¹⁴ (180+) gathered the four gospels and formed them into one book. He started from the first verse of the Gospel according to St. John, *“In the beginning was The Word”* and persuade in east phraseology avoiding the same subject mentioned in the four gospels. He called his united Gospel the "Diatessaron" - this is a Greek word which means “through the four”. The Syrians called it “the mixed Gospel”, to be distinguished from the separated gospels. It comprised of 55 chapters. He compiled it in Syriac, relying upon the opinion of some scholars and upon the translation which is known today by the Sinait, for its manuscript being discovered in St. Catherine's monastery at the Peninsula of Sinai, and upon the Pshitta translation according to other scholars. He translated it into Greek¹⁵. The Syrians loved the Diatessaron and they read it in their churches especially in Edessa and both districts of Euphrates and Mesopotamia, until its usage had been cancelled by Raboula, bishop of Edessa in the fifth century, to covet eagerly the soundness of the Revealed Book, and place instead the separated gospels. There is no complete manuscript of it today.

Saint Ephraim the Syrian (373+) commented on the Diatessaron, this commentary was translated into Armenian. It has a manuscript in Armenian which was written in the year 1195 AD and was printed and published by Oshar together with its Latin translation in the year 1876. It was translated into Arabic in the 11th century and in the year 1888 the Arabic text - translated into Latin - was published. It was translated into English and then into Dutch between 1896 and 1926¹⁶.

Lastly, the unique Syriac manuscript of Saint Ephraim's translation of the Diatessaron was printed and published at Oxford in 1963 and translated into the Latin language.

SOME OF ITS MANUSCRIPTS REMAINED TILL TODAY

Through the ages, manuscripts of the books of the Holy Bible were discovered together or separated in their original languages or translations. Among those, are the manuscripts of the Dead Sea which were discovered in 1947. The Dead Sea Scrolls are scrolls of parchment upon the most important of which is the complete text on the Book of Isaiah in Hebrew. This dates back to the first century AD.. Their importance is declared because there was no other complete manuscript in Hebrew dating back before the 9th century AD.

The Vatican's complete manuscripts include, Old Testament Scriptures with most of the second canonical books and the Scriptures of the New Testament, except the first and second Epistles to Timothy, the epistle to Titus and the book of Revelation. King Constantine took heed in transcribing it into Greek in 328 AD. This is called the Sinait manuscript and includes two thirds of the Old Testament books - its date of transcription goes back to the fourth century AD. The British museum owned it in 1933.

In the same monastery of St Catherine, a great text of both testaments transcribed in the 4th century was discovered in 1844. Currently it is kept at the Royal Library at Batersburg¹⁷. At Saint Matay's monastery - Mousol, there is an old copy of the New Testament which is written in Syriac which was translated into

Arabic in 1189 AD¹⁸.

Another manuscript which is known as “the Alexandrian” - whose translation dates back to the 5th century AD - includes all the books of both testaments. It was among the manuscripts of the Patriarchate of Alexandria but is currently in the British museum and has been there since the year 1628. It was written in Greek with the Asfeen letters which were in use till the 9th century AD.

The Ephraimite text is another text – this is kept at the Sultanic Library in Paris. It was called Ephraimite because the person who owned it wrote on it the hymns of Saint Ephraim. A scholar was able to efface the writings of Saint Ephraim and the original writing of the Holy Bible appeared. It is very old and goes back to the fourth century AD.

We have previously mentioned the books of the New Testament in Syriac, however, another Syriac text of the Gospel was discovered in 1950. It appeared in the peninsula of Sinai at the monastery of St Catherine. Its transcription date goes back to the 4th century. An Arabic translation of the Torah was also found which is from the 7th century¹⁹.

THE STRANGELO WRITING IN SYRIAC

Syrian calligraphists also wanted to excel in transcribing the Scriptures of the Holy Bible. At the beginning of the third century, the erudite, Paul, son of Arqa the Syrian – an Edessian - invented a special form of writing to transcribe the Gospels. It was called by the name Estrangelo or The Edessian²⁰. The Syrian Church can be proud, that the oldest text of the Holy Gospels known today was transcribed in Syriac by the calligraphist Jacob in Edessa in the year

411 AD²¹ and is kept in the British museum and also from among the most important manuscripts of the Holy Bible in Syria, the manuscripts of the Vatican which was written in the year 548AD and the manuscript of the library of Florence – which was written in the year 586AD by Rabin Rabula. This is called The Gospel of Rabula and includes 26 colourful paintings²². In addition to the excellence and beauty of the handwriting, these volumes were also distinguished by variegation and paintings which become a wonder in art and fashioning. All texts are kept in the libraries of the Syrian Churches and monastries and at the international museums and book cases declare that.

PUBLISHING THE NEW TESTAMENT PRINTED IN SYRIAC

In the middle of the 16th century AD, the Patriarch of Antioch Mar Ignatius Abdallah Estephan (1520-1557+) sent priest Moses, Son of priest Isaac Al-Soury²³ to Austria. By the mediattion of the orientalist, the scholar and professor of ecclesiastical law John Badmanstadius who was aquatinted with the Syriac language, the printing of the books of the New Testament was accomplished for the first time, in Syriac compatible with the text of the Simple (Pshitta) translation. This acquired in Vienna in the year 1555 at the time of Ferdinandos (1503-1564AD) King of Romania, Germania, Hungary and Bohemia and the Prime-Minister of East and West Austria at that time.

The book was printed in western Syriac writing which was compiled at the 9th century AD., but the headings were written in Strangelò. It included the Scriptures of the New Testament except the second and third Epistles of Saint John, the Epistle of Jude and the Revelation of John the Apostle.

The Scriptures of the Book were divided into chapters usually read in the Syrian Church at the beginning of the Mass on Sundays and feast days. This book is considered as a rarity of the art of printing and it is the first printed Syriac book which has been published²⁴.

The printed books of both Testaments were published in London in the year 1833 in Arabic letter and they were reprinted after the second canonical books being included to them in the year 1968.

ITS DIVISION INTO CHAPTERS

Initially, each of the Holy Bible books was one Chapter from its beginning to the end, except the Book of Psalms and that of Song of Songs. It has been said, that the Scriptures of the Old Testament were divided into 699 chapters by Ezra the scribe or the prophet Moses. The division of the other Scriptures into chapters, was done by the Cardinal Hogar (1263+) and the division of the chapters into verses took place in the year (1545) by Robert the famous French printer.

The scholar Saint Jacob of Edessa²⁵ (died 708 AD) divided the Syriac Simple (Pshitta) translation into chapters, writing at the beginning of each chapter a summary and in the foot-note a word explaining, as well as possible the correct punctuation²⁶.

ITS READING IN THE CHURCH

The Syrians appointed chapters from the Scriptures of the Book which they read on Sundays and Feast days in the church within the ecclesiastical Rite. They fixed for each Sunday and Feast day, three readings from the Old Testament, the third from the Scriptures of

prophecies, and three readings from the New Testament, namely; The Book of the Acts of the Apostles, one of the Catholic Epistles from the writings of St. Paul and from the Holy Gospel. These readings are increased or decreased with respect to the occasion in practicing the Sacraments of the Church, fasts and seasons. It is observed, that the Syrians excluded from the Holy Bible the readings from the books of Song of Songs, Revelation of John and the majority of the both Maccabees²⁷.

ITS COMMENTARY

The scholars of Christianity took care in commenting on and explaining the Holy Bible adequately. The oldest Syrian commentator is St. Ephraim (373+) who commented on the Scriptures of both testaments, this commentary has been lost. He also commented on the Diatessaron - the mixed Gospel - as aforementioned. It has been said, that if the Syriac text of the Holy Bible is lost, we will be able to gather it from the writings of Saint Ephraim. Apart from Saint Ephraim the Syrian, the most famous Syrian commentators are: Jacob of Seruge (521+), Philloxinos of Mabugh (523+), John Son of Aftoonya (538+), Daniel of Salah (542+), Marootha of Tigris (649+), Jacob of Edessa (708+) who was called with (The Books Commentator), Moses Son of Keepho (903+), Bar-Hebraeus (1286+) and specially Bar-Slaibi (1171+).

The scholar Patriarch Aphrem I Barsom said: "But the method which they did follow (in commenting) is either commenting on the verses, verse by verse or confining to the verses which need to be commented on. Some of them adopted the system of the school of Antioch in relying on the literal and pronounciatory meaning, and some of them followed the method of the Alexandrian School and dived for the symbolic spiritual meaning. Some of them gathered

both methods, especially as Bar-Slaibi did".²⁸

ITS FAULTLESSNESS

God kept His Holy Book sound from any misinterpretation, change, contradiction or abolition, it was not defected since it was written and it will never be.

The transcribers were taking total care of writing it. They knew how many letters there were in each line, page or Scripture, they were afraid of the punishment for increasing or decreasing a letter or a do. It has been said in the Book of Revelation: *For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. (Revelation 22:18-19).* And the Lord said: *"And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail" (Luke 16:17) and "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." (Mat 24:35).*

Therefore, the Holy Bible is infallible. The believers safeguarded it in both testaments as the pupil of the eye. The Jews , on top of being divided into many sects and groups and disagreed in many affairs, all agreed that the books of the Old Testament are revealed from God. Likewise the Christians, concerning the texts of both testaments, "ALL THE BOOK IS REVEALED FROM GOD" and "YOUR WORD IS TRUTH" (Jn.17:17)

The Scriptures of the Holy Bible were written in many languages, namely: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek - and some thought, that the

Book of Job, was first written in Arabic. They were written by many prophets and apostles in different epochs and these Scriptures were translated into many different languages and accents. The manuscripts in these languages are counted by hundreds and are kept in museums and famous libraries. The date of transcribing some of the books of the Old Testament goes back to the first century BC, but the Scriptures of the New Testament together with the Old Testament goes 2nd, 4th, 6th and 8th centuries AD. They were the first to be published after the invention of printing in the 15th century. Scholars examined these manuscripts and what had been printed of the Scriptures, with the present day. They found that these manuscripts were in total accord with each other with no disagreement in their meaning, though they were old and originated from different and widely separated countries.

Although the fathers of the Church had originated from different countries and had different languages, trends and dogmatic belief through ages and generations, they quoted in their writings verses from the Holy Bible. On comparing these verses with the original text of the Holy Bible there is clear proof concerning the soundness of the Book from any misconception.

Also what proves the truth of the Holy Bible, its faultlessness, veracity and that it is revealed from God, is what has been brought forward from prophecies concerning the old nations which had been entirely fulfilled after many years as the history and archaeology of these nations testify. It has been said: "The light which shines upon the Holy Bible, from the discoveries which took place in the Holy Land is inapproachable by the light of any other discoveries".

The prophets of the Old Testament prophesied about the coming of the Lord Christ as a Saviour and Redeemer before His coming by

thousands of years. The generations waited for Him, until He came fulfilling all the prophecies in a wondrous way - in such a manner that even those prophecies which detailed the Lord's life on earth, from His birth to His ascension into heaven were fulfilled. Some apostates studied these prophecies which were recorded in the Scriptures of the Old Testament and are in common use by Jews and Christians, they found them compatible to the events in which the Lord passed through, despite the fact that they were written about him many generations before his coming. Some went on to become believers.

The Apostles accepted the divine truths although surpassing their understanding. This is lucid proof of their faithfulness in safeguarding the Book to be sound from any change. The subject of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, was also not easily accepted - even Simon Peter when he heard the Lord talking about His death, said: *"Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"*. (Mat 16:22). Despite the difficulties of the thought the Apostles were preaching it, because it was true. This confirms that the Gospel is true and genuine. The four Evangelists wrote their gospels in different places but they agree with the testimony which they witnessed in the Gospel about the crucifixion of Christ and His resurrection. This was despite that preaching Christ crucified was and still is a stumbling block to the Jews and ignorance to the gentiles. As well the Jews did not dare to change or delete any verse out of the prophecies of the prophets which declares the truth of the death and the resurrection of Messiah. This is the strongest proof about the truth of the Scriptures of the Book and their soundness. Therefore the Lord directs the glances of the Jews to the Scriptures, He said: *"Search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me."* (John 5:39). And He also said: *"You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures*

nor the power of God.” (Matthew 22:29).

CONCLUSION

In order to not be lead into error, and to know the power of God, we have to study the Scriptures of the Holy Bible and to be illuminated by the light of the word of God while we walk in the paths of life, according to the Psalmist's saying: *Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path. I have sworn and confirmed That I will keep Your righteous judgments. (Psalms 119:105-106).*

Saint John Chrisostom (407+) said: "Ore, for those who are not acquainted with it, is only dust. But those who have tested it in fire, recognised it well - its value is high and costly. So is the case with the divine Book, as for many who ignore it, they consider it like other books. But those who experienced it, recognised that it is more valuable than pure gold, the reason for which they read it and become rich with it". And the Psalmist said: *The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;... The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;... The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold. (Psalms 19:7-10).*

The Holy Bible is a factory creating the best men and women. Through it we know who we are, who is our God and what is our destiny. We learn to please God the Most High and do His will. This is why Saint Paul the Apostle said to his disciple Timothy: *and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim 3:15).*

And the Lord said: *“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread*

alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4). And we are in a hunger state to hear the word of God (Amos 8:11).

The good believer is he who loved the word of God (Psalms 119:14). *But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. (Psalms 1:2).*

How beautiful is the house which is adorned by the Holy Bible! The members of the family read from it in their daily meditations. Verily, that Christ will be with them as one of them, according to His promise: *For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:20).*

The holy Church who is mother and teacher is calling us to honour the Holy Bible. According to our Syrian Rite, it is set up in the middle of the altar's door. In every church there is a small wooden pulpit, which is called in Syriac (Goghoolto) which means Golgotha, on which the holy Gospel is layed, and the face of the Gospel is covered with plate of gold or gilt silver on it pictures of the four Evangelists and the holy cross, to be kissed by faithfuls for blessings on entering or departing the church. And the Church specified a call saying by one of the deacons before the reading of the Holy Gospel in the church during the ritual services, with which he calls the believers to stand well and listen with fear and wisdom to hear the word of the tidings of salvation, while incense is redolenting. The reader of the Gospel according to the Syrian Orthodox Rite, is he who offers the divine sacrifice, be he Patriarch, Bishop or Priest.

The Fathers of the Church composed special prayers to be recited by the believers before the reading of the Holy Bible in their personal or family meditations. They are supplications through which they

ask the Lord to enlighten their minds to understand the meaning of the word of life.

The reading of the Holy Bible awakes our conscience, reproves us for our sins, and calls us to repent and return to God.

Our beloved ones, we call you to study the Holy Bible, not like studying other book. But you have to read it with the spirit of the pure prayer, because God talks to us through it. Then read it with reverence, humbleness, simplicity and faith, because it is not only the best Book of prayer, but is the best book of all.

The best with which we conclude our subject, is the saying of the Lord: *blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it! (Luke 11:28).*

MARGINAL NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Testament the word means covenant. The covenant which God had promised to the children of Israel through Moses, is called Old Testament. That which God had promised to all humanity through His beloved Son our Lord Jesus Christ, is called the New Testament. Afterwards, the books of the first testament were known by the (Old Testament) and the books of the second testament, by the (New Testament). (See, Michael Mina, Science of theology, Egypt 1948 Vol. 1 p. 43).

² Daniel Robos: What is the Holy Bible? Arabic translation by Michael Al Sirjy - Beirut 1959.

³ The books of the Old Testament are: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, The Wisdom, Jesus Son of Sirach, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees.

⁴ The books of the New Testament are: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of Saint Paul to, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philomel, Hebrews, Epistle of St. James, both first and second Epistles of St. Peter the Apostle, first, second and third Epistles of St. John, Jude and Revelation.

⁵ Patriarch Jacob III, The Syrian Church of Antioch, Damascus 1971, P 40, from the book (The Melkites) by Archpriest Isaac Armala and P.104, quoting from the Dictionary of the Holy Bible, by Vicoro PP. 132 & 133.

⁶ Maarat Masreen, a town in the governorate of Edleb - Syria.

⁷ Patriarch Aphraim 1, Barsoum, Syriac Literature and Sciences, Baghdad 1976, P. 521.

⁸ Patriarch Aphraim 1, Barsoum, Syriac Literature and Sciences, PP 46 & 215-216.

⁹ Bar-Hebraeus, The Lights, chapter six of the fourth part of the last article. Also see, Patriarch Aphraim 1 Barsoum, Syriac Literature and sciences P.44.

¹⁰ Patriarch Aphraim 1, Barsoum, Syriac Literature and Sciences P. 279.

¹¹ The Egyptian Light, No.31, July 1950.

¹² In a tritise printed in Bonn 1865, the professor Juanis Calder mentioned what covers some of the Arabic manuscripts of the Holy Gospel, from among them the manuscript of the university of Laibzegh (Germany) which was written in the year 750 or 850 AD. It came from the Syrians monastery in Egypt and it is complete. It was translated from the Syriac simple (Pshitta) translation and Vatican's manuscript. And its parts from the Arabic translation of the Gospel, goes back to the ninth century and another one to the 11th century. We must also mention the Arabic translation which is attributed to Abdallah Son of Al-Tayib who is called by Abee-Al-

Faraj (1043+). Also the rhymed translation of Yeshu AL-Soubawee (1318+).

¹³ The Patriarchal Journal, Damascus, Year 1, P. 69.

¹⁴ Was born idolater in Hedyab (Arbeel - Iraq) around the year 110. Was converted into Christianity, followed the Ankratite sect and was excommunicated by the Church. He wrote in Greek many compilations, nothing known by him in Syriac except the Diatesaron. He was friend of Justinus the martyr. (See the Syriac Literature and Sciences, P.522).

¹⁵ Patriarch Aphraim 1, Barsoum, The Syriac Literature and Sciences P.521.

¹⁶ Patriarch Jacob III, The Syrian Church of Antioch, Damascus 1971, PP. 27 & 28.

¹⁷ The Guide of the seeker, to the precious Holy Bible, Beirut, 1937 PP. 25 & 26, and the book of the Dastour AL-Baher in the guide to the pure Book P.109 and the Infallibility of the Book P.44.

¹⁸ Patriarch Aphraim 1, Barsoum, The Syriac Literature and Sciences P.59.

¹⁹ The Egyptian Lighthouse, No.31, July 1950.

²⁰ Patriarch Aphraim 1, Barsoum, The Syriac Literature and Sciences P.26.

²¹ The Golden Syrian Age, Vicount De Trazi, P.83.

²² Catalogue of the manuscripts of Florance No. 1.

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